InforME's *What's New* Tool for Webmasters

What is It? What Can It Do?

What's New is a free resource available to state agency webmasters whose sites are hosted by InforME. It functions as a flexible mini-content-management-system, allowing webmasters to set up portions of a web site for dynamic content editing through a web-browser interface. Any authorized person (with a password) from the agency can then update content for that portion of the web site via a web browser, without knowing HTML, without using special software, and without the worry of accidentally changing HTML coding or layout on the web pages.

What's New is best suited to web content that is updated frequently and involves a set of multiple items of information, in which each item includes the same type of data and is formatted the same way. For example, press releases, a calendar of events, an FAQ, a staff directory, a directory of office locations, or a list of printed materials. Each of these examples consists of multiple items that are similar in nature. A set of press releases involves multiple press releases, each one containing the same basic information (a date, a headline, and some copy).

Overview of Features:

- Password protected web interface for data entry of content items
- Can set different levels of access for different users
- Flexible template system allows integration with the look and feel of any web site design
- One set of information can be displayed on multiple pages of a site, using different views or templates
- Auto-archiving and display control features to automate when each item will appear, disappear, or move to an archive page on the web site.
- Up to 10 custom-defined text fields available

Benefits of Using *What's New*

- No need to know programming, no need for special software
- Content items can be entered or updated by any authorized staff person, not just the webmaster
- Content editors can't accidentally change the page design or code

Access to *What's New*

To use *What's New*, you need a *What's New* account with InforME. This free account will provide you a username and password to access the system. To request an account, send an email to creative@informe.org with your name, agency, email address, and a short description of how you plan to use the tool and the web site/URL where you will use the tool (e.g., "to post press releases on Agency XYZ's site at www.maine.gov/xyz/").

To log in to *What's New*, open your web browser and go to http://www.state.me.us/tools/whatsnew/admin/.

Assistance from InforME

What's New was created to allow webmasters to set up and use its features independently. However, if you are not comfortable with the initial set up process or just don't have much time, InforME can complete the set up for you at an hourly rate of $50. Once the initial set up is complete, your agency staff will easily be able to use the web interface for adding and editing content.

Overview of How What's New *Works*

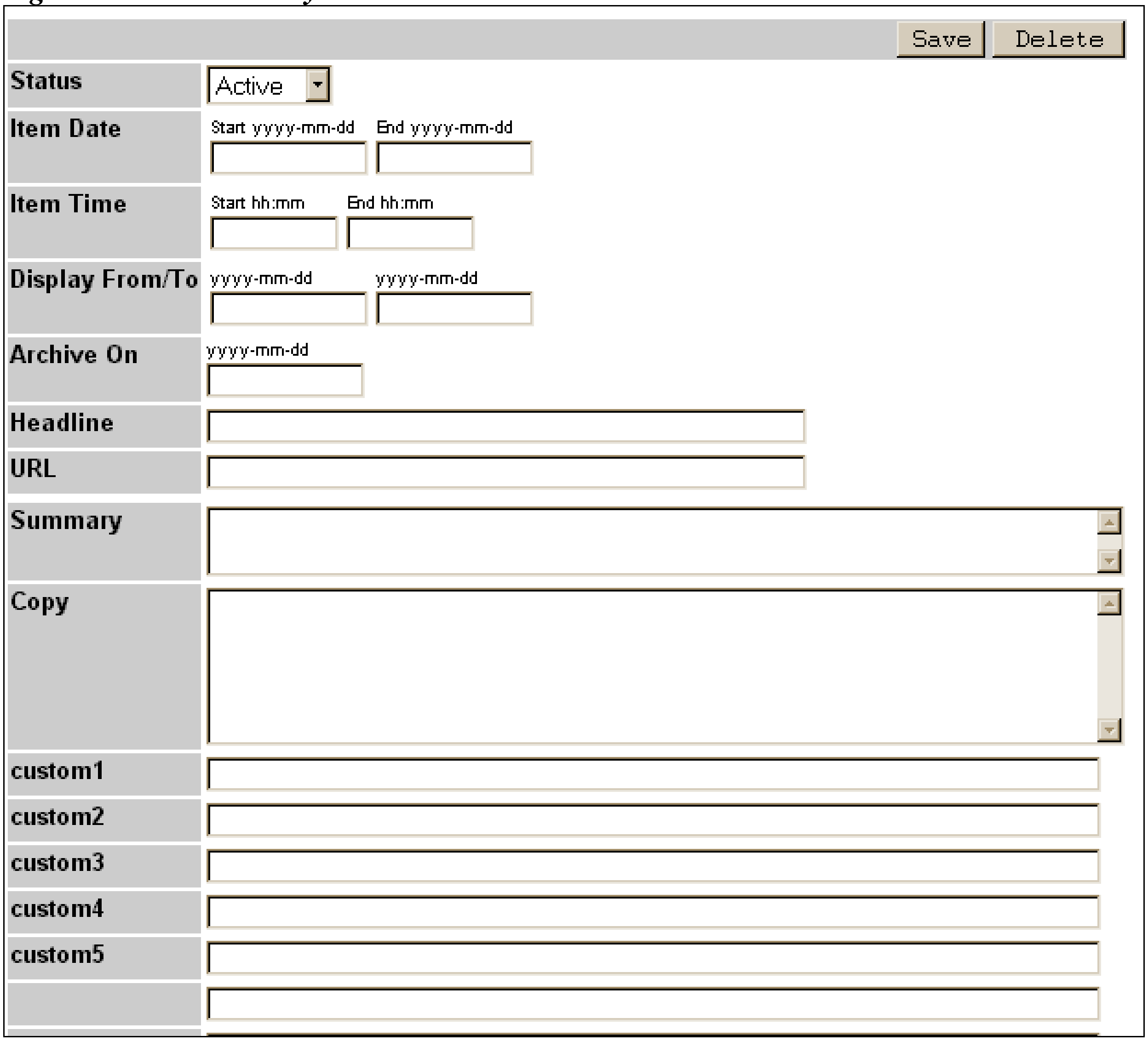
What's New involves three essential pieces – 1) the code on your HTML page(s) to pull your content onto the page, 2) the template that defines how the content will be displayed, and 3) the content items.

The code that pulls the content from *What's New* and displays it on your HTML page(s) is a "server-side include (SSI)". This is one line of code, invisible to the viewer, that instructs the server to connect to *What's New*, to your particular account and set of data, retrieve information, and display it on the page in a particular way. This line of code needs to be added to your page during the initial set up process.

The template is also defined during the initial set up process, after logging in to your *What's New* account. The template is HTML code that controls which fields from your data will be displayed, in what order, and in what layout and design to integrate with the rest of your page or site design.

The content items are entered through a web interface, after logging in to your account (see Figure 1). These items are stored in a database at InforME. A "content item" means one item from your set of information, such as one press release, one event, or one FAQ. Each content item may include several fields; for example, a press release might include a date, headline, and copy, and an event might include a date, start time, end time, event name, description, and location. Your content items may use any or all of the default fields provided in the Item Entry Screen.

Figure 1: New Item Entry Screen



Getting Started

The first step is to decide exactly how you plan to use *What's New*. Which page or pages of your web site are suited to *What's New*? (See introduction for suggestions.) Each use of *What's New* is called a "Topic". You can have multiple Topics set up for your web site, for example, you might have topics for "AgencyX Press Releases", "AgencyX Calendar", and "AgencyX FAQ". Once you've selected one or more uses for *What's New*, think about each one in terms of what pieces of information occur in each item. For example, press releases usually include a release date, a headline, and some copy.

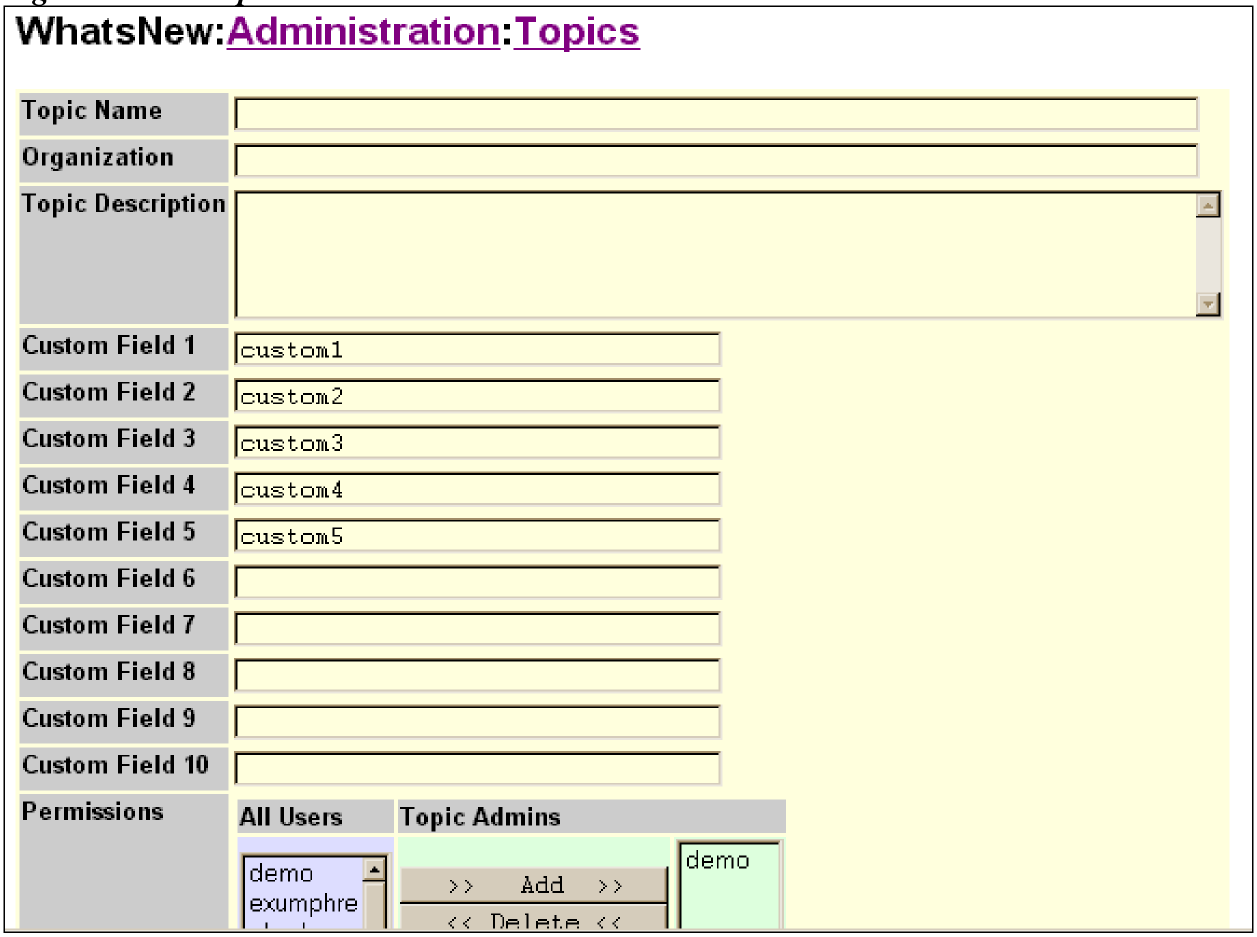
Topic Administration

Next, decide who will be the administrator of each topic and who will be responsible for adding and updating the content items for each topic (these can be the same person or different people). The Topic Administrator is responsible for creating the topic template(s), adding the necessary server-side include code to the HTML pages, and has access to all content items and templates for the given topic. The Topic Administrator can also give create new topics and can give access to their topic(s) to any existing *What's New* users. "Topic Users" are the content updaters (if different from the Administrator), and have access only to adding, updating, and deleting content items; Topic Users cannot create or modify templates, topics, or user access. InforME is available to serve as Topic Administrator (performing all set up functions) for agencies for a $50 per hour fee.

Setting Up a Topic

For Topic Administrators, your first topic will be created for you when you request your *What's New* account. To create additional topics, simply log in to *What's New*, select "Topic Administration", and select "New Topic". You'll see a blank topic form to fill out.

Figure 2: New Topic Screen



Please provide a Topic Name, your Organization (agency/division/bureau) name, and a brief description of the purpose of this topic, including the URL of the site where it will be used. We recommend limiting topic names to one or two words, and avoiding any special characters (anything other than letters or numbers). If you would like to define any custom fields in addition to the default fields provided in *What's New*, you may do so by naming up to 10 custom fields on this screen. From this screen you can also give access to your topic to other *What's New* users, as either Administrators or Users. You can return to this screen later and modify your topic settings by selecting Topic Administration from the main menu, then your topic name.

Note: As Topic Administrator, you may add or remove user permissions to your topic. We recommend that you add or retain InforME as an Administrator for all topics, for trouble-shooting purposes (we can better help you if we can access your topic to view template code, etc.).

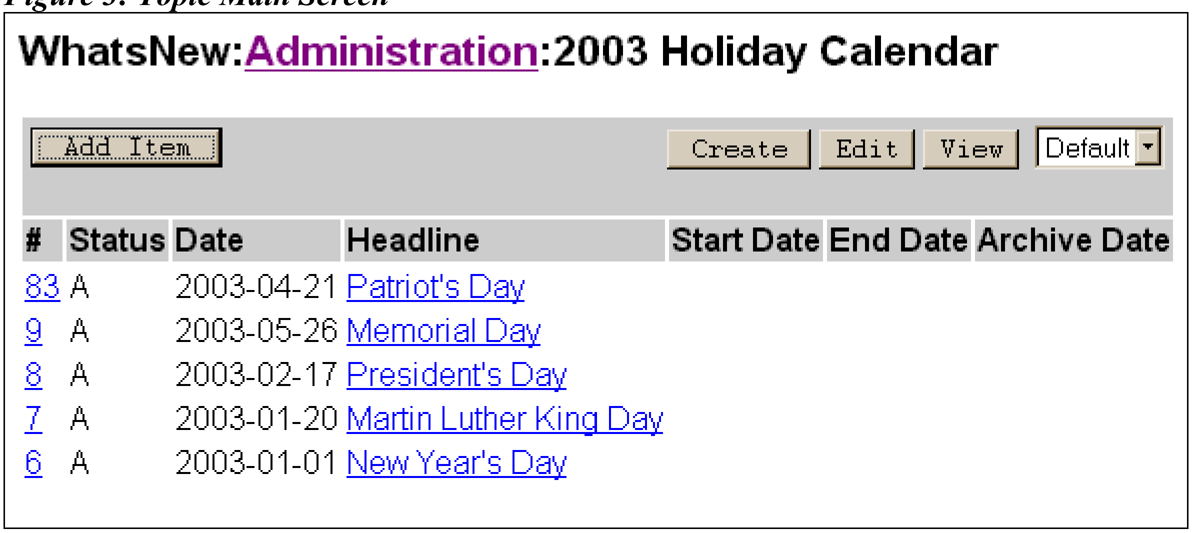
Planning Your Topic's Content

You may want to enter a few test items in your topic so you'll have some data to work with during the rest of the set up process. To do this, select your topic name from the Administration menu, then select Add Item and enter some sample data in the fields you plan to use for this topic. This will also help you to plan which data entry fields you will use and whether you need to define any custom fields. Your content items may use any or all of the default fields provided in the Item Entry Screen. Also, keep in mind that the default fields are named generically and can be used in multiple ways. For example, the "Headline" field could be a headline (for a news item), or could be the name of an event (for a calendar item), or could be a question (for an FAQ item). For some topics, you might only want to use the Headline field, for other topics you may want to use several fields, such as the headline, URL, copy, and custom fields for "location", "contact person", and "email address".

Setting Up a Template

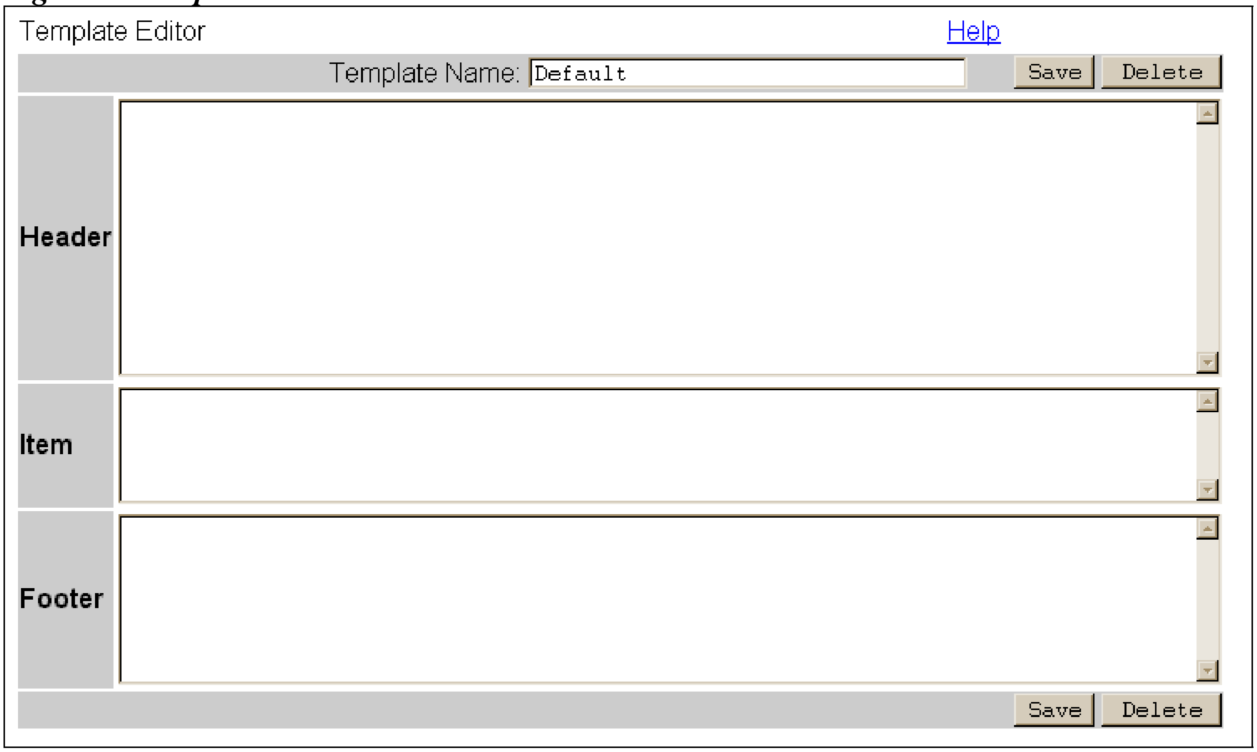
Each topic has its own template or templates that control how content items will be displayed on the web site. When you select a topic from the main menu, you'll see the main topic screen (see Figure 3), which displays all items that have been entered, along with an "add item" button, and template control buttons (Topic Users won't see the template control buttons). The template control buttons are the "Create", "Edit", "View" buttons and the drop-down menu of all templates for this topic.

Figure 3: Topic Main Screen



To modify an existing template, select the template by name in the drop-down menu, then select the "Edit" button. You may preview your items in any template by selecting the template in the drop-down menu, then selecting the "View" button. To create a template, select the Create button. You will see a blank Template Editor page (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Template Editor Screen



Start by giving your template a name. We recommend simple one-word names and avoiding any special characters (anything other than letters and numbers) – you'll see why when you learn to format the server-side include or URL. The header, item and footer boxes are for HTML code. Templates can work in two ways: 1) the template can generate the entire page containing your content items, or 2) the template can generate a segment of a page that will be inserted into a standard HTML page on your site (using a server-side include tag). For most purposes, the latter option is recommended. See the Press Releases Example for a good example of using both types of templates for a single topic.

Generating the Whole Page With a Template

If you want *What's New* to generate the entire page dynamically, you'll need to type or paste in the HTML for the entire page. The Header box should contain the HTML from the opening <HTML> tag up to the point where your content items will start. The Item box should contain the HTML for how your items will be displayed (see "Displaying Content Items"). The Footer box should contain the HTML for the rest of the page, from the end of your content items to the closing </HTML> tag.

If your page is being generated by *What's New*, it no longer sits in your web site directory and any relative links (including images) in your code will not work. To correct this, you can use absolute links (full URL) in the template code, or you can add a "baseref" tag to the Header code, which tells the server that all links in the code are relative to the URL given. This tag must be placed inside the <HEAD></HEAD> tags in your header code and is formatted as:

<base href="http://www.maine.gov/yoursite/">. Remember that if you copied code from a page in a subdirectory on your site, the URL in the baseref tag should be at the subdirectory level, e.g., <base href="http://www.maine.gov/yoursite/subdirectory/">.

You may be wondering, "If *What's New* is generating the whole page, how does a person get to it when using my web site?" In this case, your page would be accessed through a link from another page of your site. The URL you use in the link is formatted specially to connect to *What's New* and generate your page with specific options. To learn how to format the URL correctly, see "Adding the Server-Side Include." (You won't actually use the SSI tag, but the URL for your link is formatted the same way as the URL used in the SSI tag, so you can refer to those instructions.)

Generating a Page Segment With a Template

Most often, you'll probably find it easier to create your page normally in your web editing software (like Dreamweaver or FrontPage), and use the *What's New* template to format the display of your content items. In this case, you can leave the Header and Footer boxes blank, and just fill in the code to format your content items in the Item box (see "Displaying Content Items"). The last step is to add the server-side include tag on your HTML page where you want the content items to appear (see "Adding the Server-Side Include Tag").

Note: Pages containing server-side include tags must have the file extension ".shtml" in order to work correctly.

Displaying Content Items

The HTML code in the Item box on the template screen controls which fields will be displayed, in what order, and any additional text, graphics, or formatting. In the Item box, enter the code for formatting a single item; on your page it will be repeated for as many items as you have.

Use standard HTML to add text and formatting, such as line breaks, paragraph breaks, bolding or italics, font controls, etc. (If your site has a style sheet to control text formatting, you won't need to worry about font controls here.)

Insert fields from *What's New* wherever you want them to appear, using the following format:

```
<!-- $fieldname -->
```

On your page, this tag will be replaced by the content of that field for each item. A list of the field names appears below. There are also a few special variable names you can use, explained below. Custom-defined fields may be referred to by their custom names (defined in Topic Administration) or their default names (custom1, custom2, etc.).

Example of Item Code for a Press Release:

```
<h1><!-- $headline --></h1>
```

```
<p>
<!-- $item_date --></p>
<p>
<!-- $copy --></p>
<p>
```

Example of Item Code for a Calendar Event:

```
<p>
<b><!-- $item_date --> - <!-- $headline --></b><br>
<!-- $item_stime --> - <!-- $item_etime --><br>
Location: <!-- $location --><br>
<!-- $copy -->
</p>
```

What's New Field Names

Standard data entry fields

item_date	Item Start Date
item_edate	Item End Date
item_stime	Item Start Time
item_etime	Item End Time
headline	Headline
summary	Summary
copy	Copy
url	URL
custom1-custom10	Custom fields 1-10 may be inserted using "custom1"-"custom10" or using custom defined labels

Control fields (not commonly displayed on the page, but could be if needed)

start_date	Display Start Date
end_date	Display End Date
status	Status field (active or inactive)
archive_date	Archive Date

Special-purpose fields (not on the data entry screen, generated by *What's New*)

news_id	the numerical ID for an item
topic_id	the numerical ID for a topic, used in generating a URL to that topic
start_link	used with end_link to surround content and display it as an active URL (use these tags around a URL in text, or around topic_url or article_url)
end_link	the closing tag, paired with start_link

article_url	generates the special URL to display a specific single item (auto inserts topic_id and news_id into URL)
topic_url	generates the special URL to display a specific topic (all items)

A common use of article_url is to create a link from a brief item listing to the full item. For example, on your main news page, you may only want to display the dates and headlines. But you want each headline to function as a link to another page containing the date, headline and full news article for that one item. To set this up, you would use the following type of code in your template to create the "headline" link:

```
<a href="<-- $article_url -->&v=article"><!-- $headline --></a>
```

In this example, the template for the full news article was named "article" (see "Writing the URL" for more information about customizing display options using the URL).

Adding the Server-Side Include

First, create the HTML page where you want your content to appear, using your web editing software. Your page must end in the file extension ".shtml" in order for the server-side include to work. In the area of the page where you want your content displayed, insert the server-side include tag.

DreamweaverMX: From the Insert menu, select Text Object → Comment. Type the SSI code into the Comment box in the following format:

```
#include virtual="/tools/whatsnew/index.php?topic=Topicname&arguments"
```

OR

HTML code: Insert the full SSI tag into your page code in the following format:

```
<!--#include virtual="/tools/whatsnew/index.php?topic=Topicname&arguments"-->
```

Writing the URL

The SSI uses a specially formatted URL to instruct the server to connect to *What's New*, get your data, and display it the way you specify. The URL is made up of a base string plus the arguments. The base string is always the same:

```
/tools/whatsnew/index.php?
```

The **arguments** provide the specific information about what data to display and how to display it. *What's New* allows several ways of customizing your content display using the arguments in the URL. The arguments are added to the URL after the base portion (after the "?"). If you use multiple arguments, separate them by a "&".

What's New Arguments

Here is where your simple topic and template names are rewarded. If your topic name contains spaces, use a plus sign ("+") to represent each space, e.g., "AgencyX+News". If your template names contain spaces, you will need to encode them as "%20" in the URL, e.g., "/tools/whatsnew/index.php?topic=My+News&v=my%20template". If your topic or template names contain special characters (such as punctuation), you will need to encode them as well. It's much easier just to stick with simple names in the first place.

topic=topicname Specify the topic to use
Example: /tools/whatsnew/index.php?topic=AgencyXNews

v=templatename Specify the template to use
Example: /tools/whatsnew/index.php?topic=AgencyXNews&v=sidebar
If no template is specified, the "default" template is used.

orderby=[id or date or headline] Specify the sort order for displayed items.
Example: /tools/whatsnew/index.php?topic=AgencyXNews&orderby=date

desc=1 Sorts displayed items in descending order, or most recent dates first. (Default is ascending order, oldest items first)
Example: /tools/whatsnew/index.php?topic=AgencyXNews&orderyby=date&desc=1

newsid=itemid# Limit display to a specific single item
Example: /tools/whatsnew/index.php?topic=AgencyXNews&newsid=32
(Note: newsid numbers can be found on the *What's New* topic screen, next to each item.)

ar=1 Limit display to archived items
Example: /tools/whatsnew/index.php?topic=AgencyXNews&ar=1

sd=yyyymmdd Limit display to items with an item start date on or after the date specified
Example: /tools/whatsnew/index.php?topic=AgencyXNews&sd=20030101

ed=yyyymmdd Limit display to items with an item end date on or before the date specified
Example: /tools/whatsnew/index.php?topic=AgencyXNews&ed=20030515

l=# Limit display to specified number of items
Example: /tools/whatsnew/index.php?topic=AgencyXNews&l=5

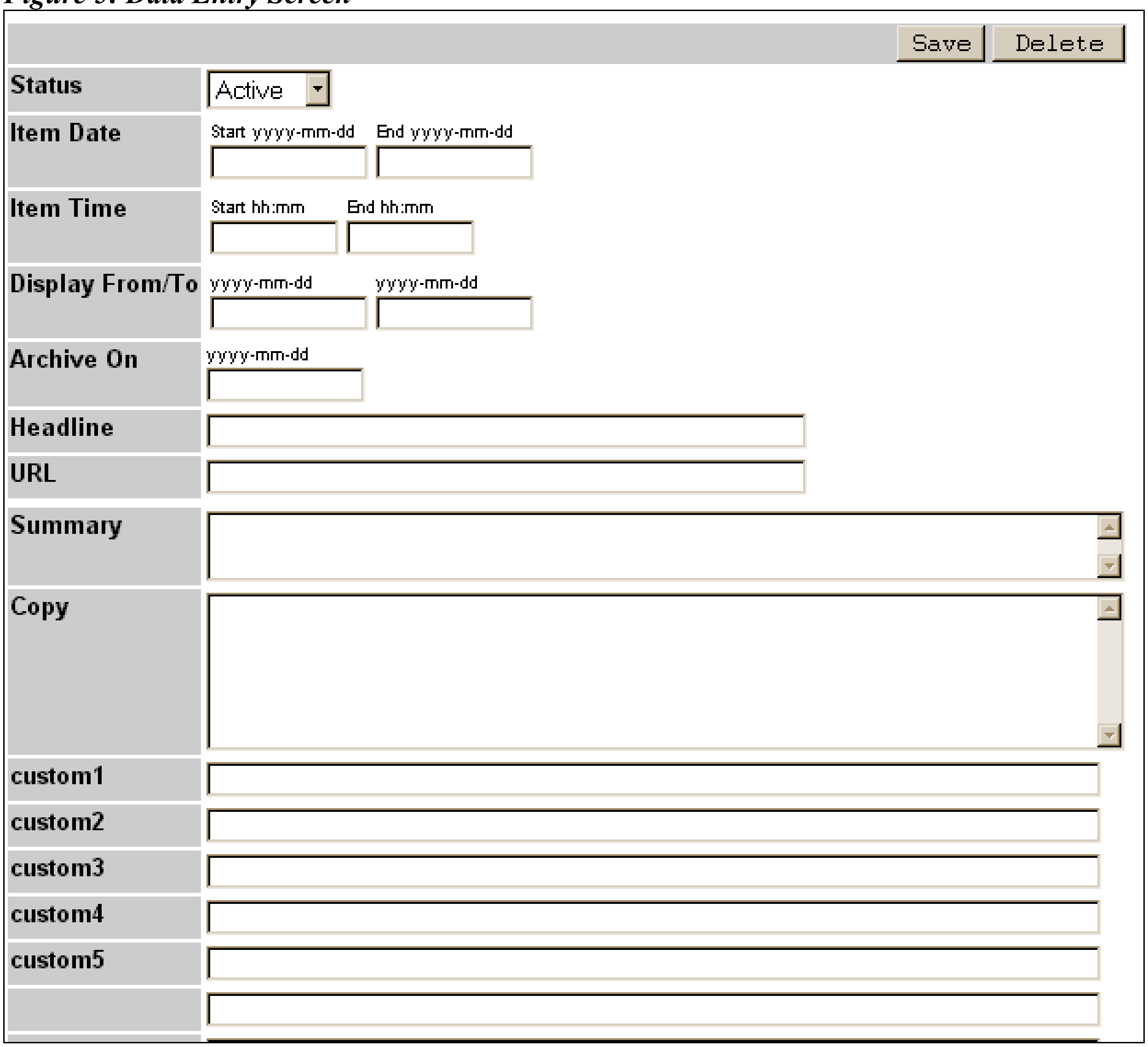
Example of combination of arguments:
/tools/whatsnew/index.php?topic=AgencyXNews&v=article&orderby=date&ar=1&desc=1&l=5
What it means: Show data from the topic "AgencyXNews", using the "article" template. Order the items by date, showing the most recent items first. Include only archived items, and show only 5 items on this page.

Data Entry of Content Items

We recommend having a simple reference page for your content updaters to use. This page should include the names of your topic(s) and the fields that should be completed for each item in each topic, as well as any special instructions for how content should be entered in specific fields.

After logging in to *What's New*, the content updater will see the list of topics to which they have access. Select the topic to edit. The next screen shows the list of existing items in that topic. Select an item to modify, or use the "Add Item" button to create a new item.

Figure 5: Data Entry Screen



All the fields are optional. Depending on your purpose and content for each topic, you may use just one field or you may use all of them. You do need to use the same fields for all items within a topic, however.

Control Fields

Status:
All items are "Active" by default. If an item is designated "Inactive", it will not be displayed on your web site. One use for this field is if you want to have someone entering your content items, but another person needs to approve them before they appear on the web site. The first person can set all the items to Inactive as they are entered, and the second person can change the items to Active once they are approved.

Display From/To:
You may use the "from" and "to" date fields alone or together. If a "from" date is entered, your item will not be displayed until that date (useful if you want to pre-enter a press release or announcement, but don't want it displayed until the official release date). If a "to" date is entered, your item will automatically disappear from your web site on that date (the item will remain in the *What's New* database).

Archive Date:
If you want to have a separate archive page on your site for older items, you can designate the date for each item to be marked "Archived". If you set up an archive page on your web site, the item will automatically move from your "current" page to your "archive" page on the designated date. (see the Press Releases Example)

Content Fields

Item Date:
Any date(s) associated with your item. This could be the release date, the posting date, the event date, etc. You may use the start date alone, or in combination with an end date. Dates should be entered in the format YYYY-MM-DD.

Item Time:
Any time(s) associated with your item. This would most often be start and/or end times for an event. You may use the start time alone, or in combination with the end time. Times should be entered in the format hh:mm.

Headline:
Any headline or title for your item. This could be a news headline, an event name, a person's name (for a staff directory), or even a question (in an FAQ).

URL:

Any URL associated with your item. This field will automatically be displayed as a link. This field has many possible uses. You may simply want to display a related URL along with each item, such as a related site for each news item. Or you may want to enter a URL for each item that you use in your templates to create a link within the text.

Summary:
A general text field. A common use for this field would be to add a "teaser" sentence or a brief summary of each news item. For example, on your home page you might want to display the most recent 3 news items, by date, headline, and a one sentence teaser, with a link to the full news article.

Copy:
A general text field for larger amounts of text. This is where you would type or paste in the body of your press release text, or the description of your event. Any URLs in this field will be displayed as links (if the full URL including http:// is used). You can use HTML code along with your text in this field if you want to apply text formatting (such as bolding or italics) or include an image (the image must already be in your web site directory on the server). If you paste in text from your word processor, the paragraph breaks will be preserved but other text formatting may be lost.

Custom Fields:
You may define up to 10 custom fields for each topic. This should be done by the Topic Administrator during the initial setup process. If custom fields have been defined, you will see the custom labels next to each field on the data entry screen. These are all text fields and may be used for a variety of purposes.

Special Features

Using *What's New* on a Virtual Domain

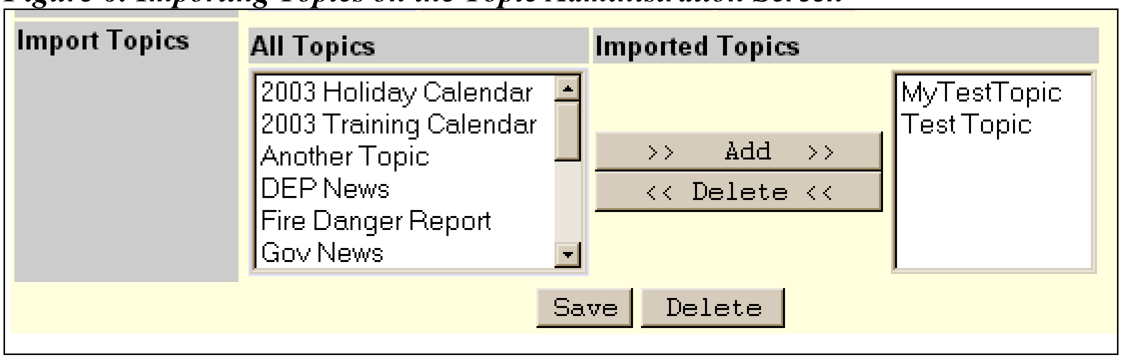
As long as your site is hosted by InforME, you can use *What's New*. However, if you have a virtual domain (e.g., www.mainefoliage.com) rather than www.state.me.us or www.maine.gov, you will need to ask InforME to set up the virtual domain for server-side includes before your *What's New* content will display on your pages.

Creating and Using a Topic Group

It is possible to combine multiple existing topics into a Topic Group. For example, if each bureau in a department uses *What's New* to post their own press releases, they would each have a separate topic (BureauAnews, BureauBnews, BureauCnews). Perhaps the Department would like to have a single page to display press releases from all bureaus. The department Topic Administrator could create a new Topic Group (DepartmentXnews), and on the Topic Administration screen, add BureauAnews, BureauBnews, and BureauCnews to this group (see

Figure 6). Now, the Administrator can create a new template for the Topic Group and set up the content display normally. The Department web site now shows all press releases, automatically updated as each bureau adds or edits content items. The bureaus can continue to maintain their own press releases and display only their bureau's items on their bureau web site. Note: When creating a Topic Group, it is important to make sure each individual topic is using the same data entry fields and entering data in a consistent manner.

Figure 6: Importing Topics on the Topic Administration Screen



Using Multiple Templates

For any topic, you may create multiple templates. This is useful if you want to display data from that topic in more than one place on your web site, using different formatting or settings. For example, perhaps on your home page you want a sidebar showing the 5 newest news headlines, but you also have a News page that displays all current news headlines. All the headlines link to the full news article for each item. In addition, you have a News Archive page showing all archived news items. Depending on the design of your site, you may want to create a different template for each of these pages (all the pages are accessing the same set of content data – your topic in *What's New*). See the Press Releases Example.

EXAMPLES

Example: Governor Baldacci's Press Releases

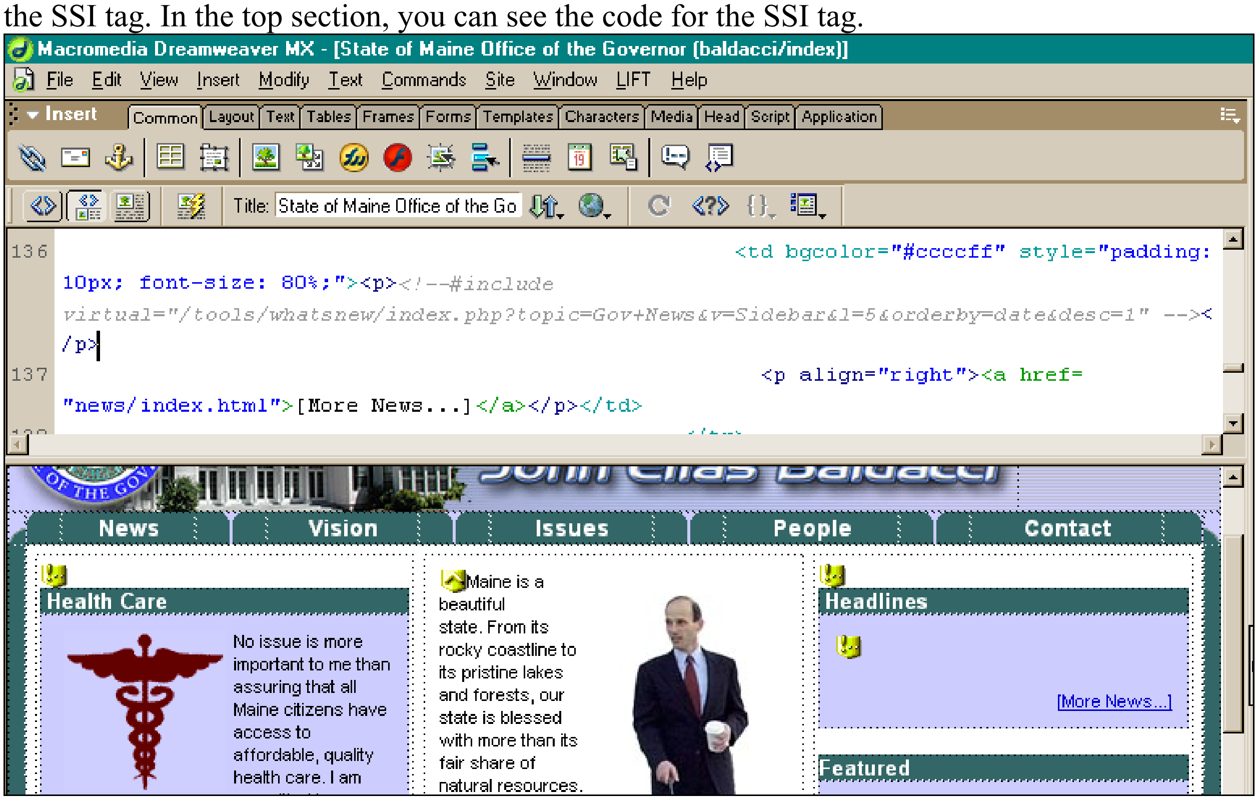
Governor Baldacci's site uses *What's New* for displaying and updating press releases.

Home Page

The Governor's home page uses *What's New* to display the five most recent news headlines in a sidebar. The sidebar template includes only the "headline" field for each item, formatted as a link to the full news article.

Governor's Home Page

The home page in Dreamweaver. You can see the yellow flag under "Headlines" that represents the SSI tag. In the top section, you can see the code for the SSI tag.



The home page is using a very simple template called "sidebar" with the following code in the Item box:

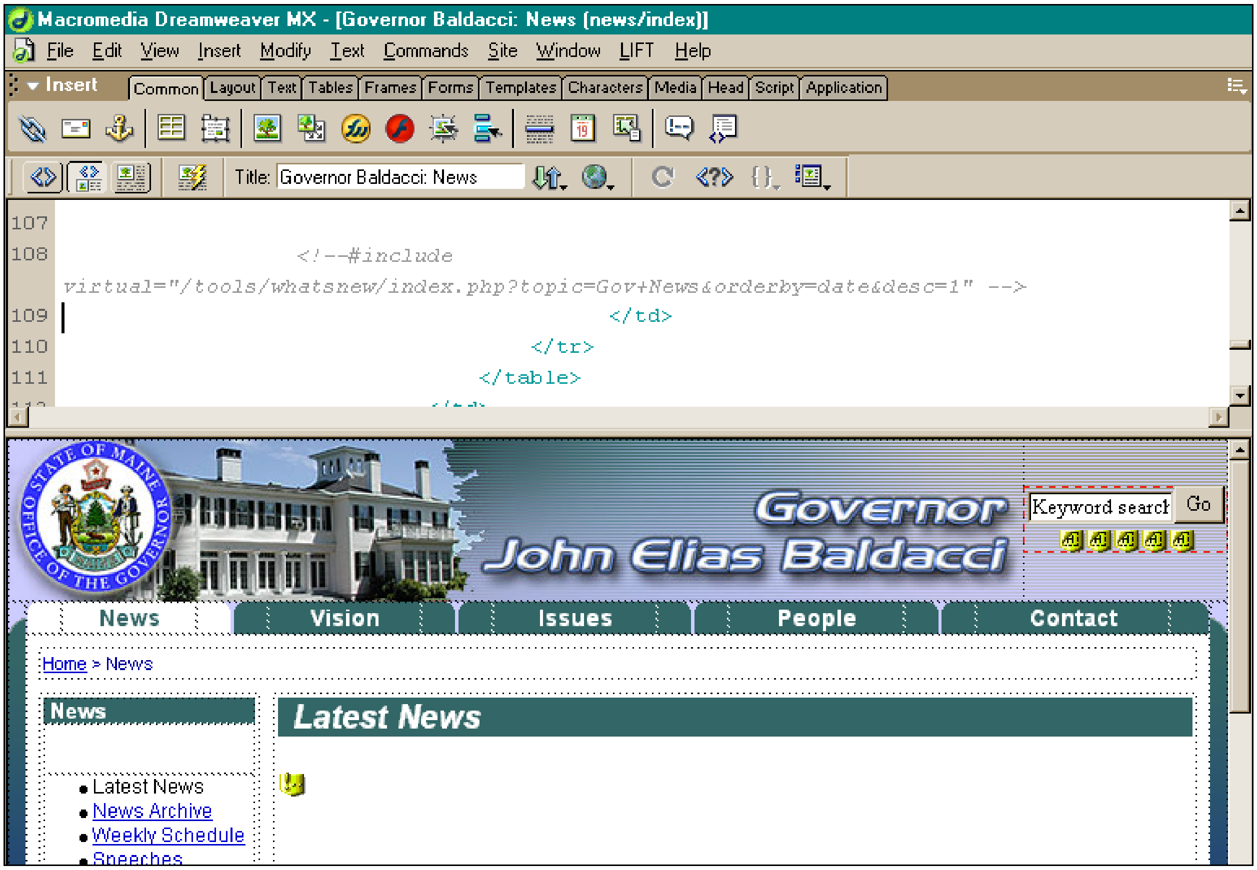
```
<a href="<!-- $article_url -->&v=Article" ><!-- $headline --></a>

<p>
```

News Page

The Governor's News page displays all the current news. This template includes the item date and the headline field, formatted as a link to the full news article.

Governor's News Page

The News Page in Dreamweaver:



The News Page is using another simple template called "Default" with the following code in the Item box:

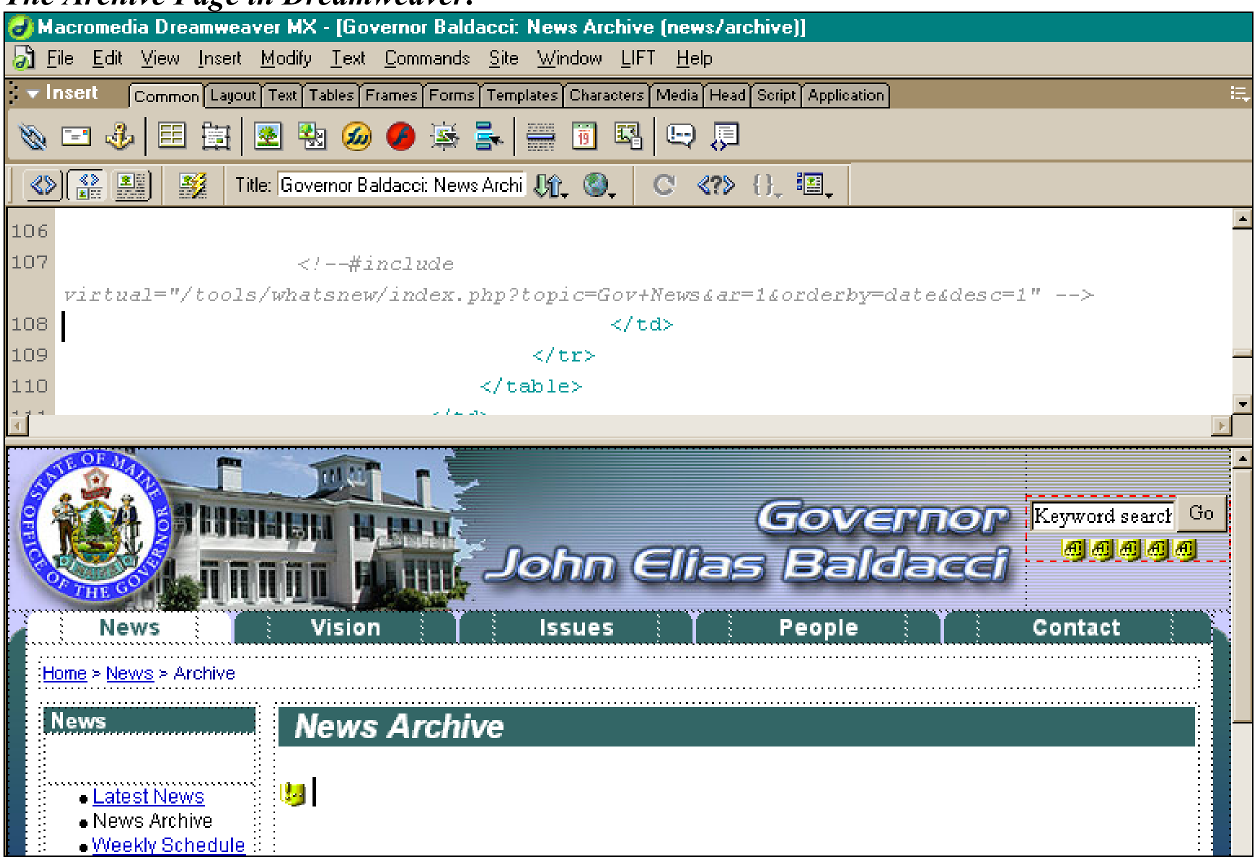
```
<!-- $item_date --> -

<a href="<!-- $article_url -->&v=Article"><!-- $headline --></a>

<p>
```

News Archive Page

The News Archive page displays all news that have been designated Archived through *What’s New*.

Governor's News Archive Page

The Archive Page in Dreamweaver:

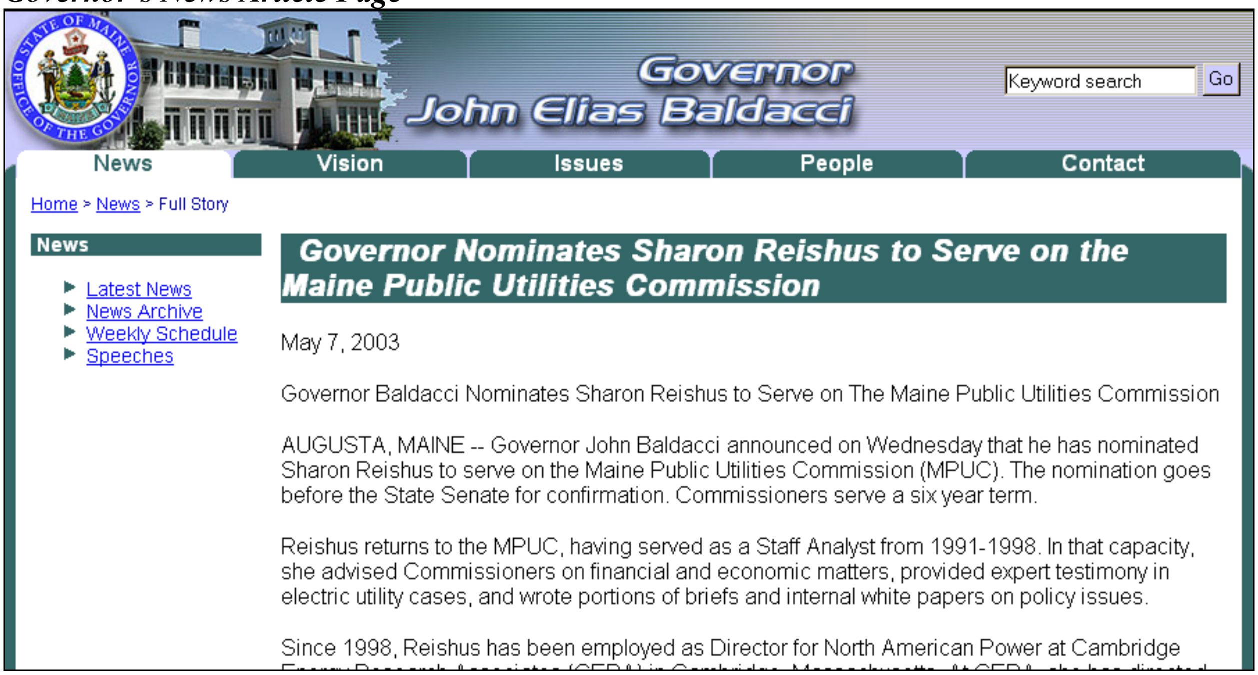


The Archive page also uses the "Default" template – items are displayed in the same format as the current news page.

The News Article Page

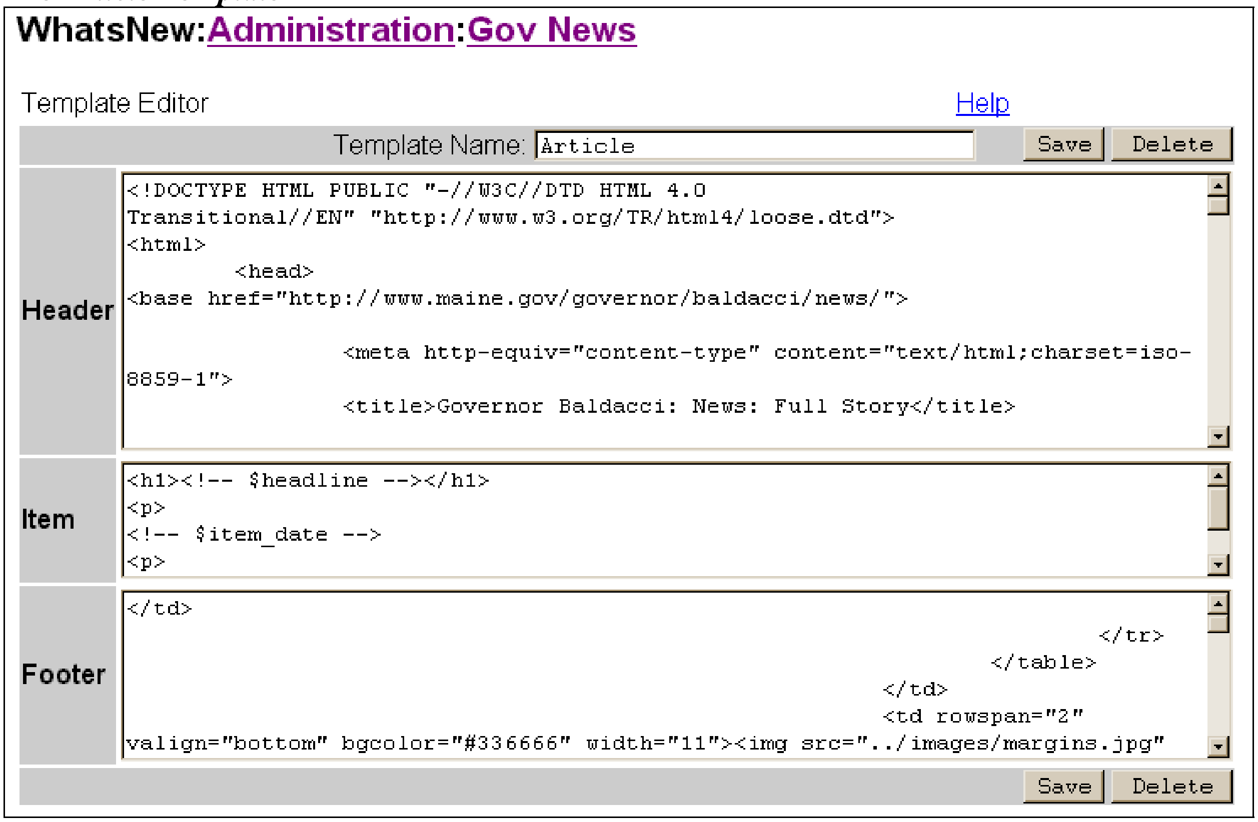
The article page is generated dynamically by *What's New* when a user clicks on a news headline. The article page displays the headline, date, and full press release copy for the selected item.

Governor's News Article Page



This page is generated by a *What's New* template called "Article". The Header box contains code for the first half of the page, the Item box controls the display of content items, and the Footer box contains the code for the rest of the page.

The Article Template



The Article template uses the following code in the Item box (a site-wide style sheet provides the formatting for the headline and body text):

<h1><!-- $headline --></h1>

<p>

<!-- $item_date -->

<p>

<!-- $copy -->

<p>